

Archaeology in Fiji

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL investigation in Fiji has gathered momentum during the last eighteen months and now that the objectives are more clearly understood and publicized, there has been a corresponding increase in support from people in various parts of Fiji. Prior to this—apart from Gifford's pioneer excavations and Laura Thompson's records from southern Lau—the only substantial field work had been that of an administrative official, A. L. Parke. Over a period of several years, Mr. Parke located many fortified sites in the Rewa region, most of which were those conveniently described as ring-ditch forts. His valuable work has been extended by the Fiji Museum Archaeological Survey, which serves to consolidate scattered and sporadic attempts by individual non-specialists. Modelled on the New Zealand Site Recording Scheme, the Survey maintains files in which are entered all information from organized field work, individual reports and literary references.

Site numbers are compounds of the code for the particular island and the number of the relevant map sheet in the 1:50,000 series, the only series on a suitable scale with a grid that will eventually cover Fiji. For example, Gifford's Site 20 at Sigatoka becomes Site VL 16/1 or Viti Levu, Sheet 16, Site 1. This is easily followed, as the 1:50,000 series runs in sets and in this example is entitled Viti Levu. It consists of 20 sheets in all which cover not only Viti Levu but the satellite islands as well. Each set is given an initial code number; islands not yet covered by the series are provisionally coded by island name and sites, numbered consecutively. As the map series is extended, the provisional numbers will be replaced by permanent file numbers assigned according to the name of the set in which they fall. To facilitate quick sorting in the files, each category of site has a distinctive color box at the top of each envelope, e.g. blue for caves and red for ring-ditch sites. The method is unsophisticated but adequate at this stage of Fijian archaeology; moreover, it is capable of being extended in categories and sub-categories.

Excavations have been started at several places. At Nasinu, near Suva, a mound within a ring-ditch provided a training-ground for Museum assistants and several helpers. Post-holes were revealed in two squares; some five thousand sherds were obtained. One lenticular stone adze and another stone artifact resembling an ulu were the only notable non-pottery materials. Preliminary work on the sherds shows that of the fewer than 1 per cent that were decorated, about half a dozen were rather worn cross-relief sherds, similar to those found by Gifford in what he called 'Early Period'; other relief sherds showed spot relief. The mound at Nasinu showed stages of lateral extension with build-up probably taken from elsewhere, which accounts for cross-relief ware close to the surface. The remainder of the pottery con-

sisted of jars with flaring lips and plain bodies, although there were sherds more suggestive of water vessels than cooking vessels.

More significant excavations were started at Karobo, about halfway between Suva and the site at Sigatoka. Karobo yielded both cross-relief, wicker-relief and flat-bottomed dishes or trays, hitherto known only from the dunes at Sigatoka. Since then, two other sites found near Sigatoka show evidence of flat-bottomed dishes. The south coast of Viti Levu may well hold the key to the solution of the enigma in the pottery assemblage. The evidence at Karobo suggests that coconut, pandanus, candlenut and *ivi* (Tahitian chestnut) were contemporaneous with the earliest levels of pottery culture and that there has been considerable change in the sea level since the time of occupation. Work is still proceeding at this site.

The Sigatoka Valley is the object of a long-term survey by the Fiji Museum. From the seacoast to over fifty miles inland there are distinctive archaeological features. The most remarkable are circular mounds linked by causeways, sometimes merely twin units but in several sites forming complex systems of interlinked mounds. Each mound has four causeways which join it to the neighbouring mounds; the serial photograph of one site shows that this technique forms well-defined access ways through and across the soft ground comprising the site. Together with these linked mounds there are also terrace systems and ridge forts in the upper valley. Several communities are still making pottery. Considering all of these features, the Museum's choice of the Sigatoka Valley as the region deserving priority is readily appreciated. Haste is all the more imperative since the dunes at the mouth of the Sigatoka River will be removed for industrial purposes within the next few years.

During the wet season, when extremely heavy rain retards field work, it was decided to work through the very good coverage of aerial photographs taken at 8000 ft., in order to locate and plot sites on the 1:500,000 series. Most of this work has been undertaken with the specific aim of plotting the distribution of ring-ditch fortifications on the windward side of Viti Levu. Ultimately the plotting would be extended to include the intermediate and dry zones to see (a) what overall pattern was emerging (b) where was the greatest local density of sites (c) what relation ring-ditch fortifications had to topography and (d) significant common morphological factors, or what variants might be expected both within a single area and over the whole region.

Ross Duberal of the Geological Survey has done an extremely fine job of the initial raw plotting, while the Fiji Museum is re-examining the photographs to pick up more sites and to plot in those already located by ground survey. To date, over 800 ring-ditch sites have been plotted on the windward side of Viti Levu; no doubt almost as many again lie unseen in the bush along the ridges of the major river valleys. Tentative results suggest that the greatest density is among the deltas and alluvial flats of the main rivers on the windward side. There is a marked tapering off towards the intermediate zones, where the ring-ditches are thinly dispersed. Preliminary inspection of dry zone areas shows an even lower density, although river valley systems still show evidence of activity. On Vanua Levu, Geoffrey Parker of Labasa has begun recording 14 flatland and 28 hill forts in the Bucaisau Valley. A feature of the latter category of sites seems to be the extensive cutting of supplementary outer ditches in cases where a ring-ditch occupies a hill-top with ridges falling away from it. Mr. Parker has plotted over a hundred sites in the valley, ranging from forts to village and hut sites, irrigation canals, terrace systems and caves.

The significance of this work becomes apparent when one considers the reports of ridge forts in the interior of Viti Levu and on some of the outlying islands such as Wakaya, eight miles east of Ovalau. Eight of the Wakaya fortified sites have been mapped by Les Thompson, a

surveyor of the Lands Department, Suva. Some of the complex sites he mapped show similarities to recently mapped sites from Samoa and indeed, even to examples in New Zealand. Mr. Thompson's splendid work has been supplemented by his own pottery collections from the sites and by those of schoolboys from Levuka. The southern part of the island is to be examined by a Museum party in May 1965; by the end of the year the results of this project will form the basis of the Museum's first archaeological publication.

Surface collections in Rotuma were made by A. L. Parke during a four-month stay; these collections were mainly shell and stone adzes with some shell pendants and ornaments. Mr. Parke undertook limited excavation of a few burials with the permission of the Island Council. In addition to skeletal remains, he brought back grave goods consisting of pearl shell breast amulets, a pearl shell fishing lure that may have been an amulet, reel ornaments and shell pendants. This material is being prepared for publication.

A Fiji Museum Archaeological Expedition has been working for ten weeks in Kabara, in the southern Lau Group. Financed by money most generously provided by the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, the arduous work has been undertaken by Colin Smart. He has located distinctive terraced, fortified sites on limestone bases, burial and occupation caves, coastal burial and occupation sites. In one or two cases, quite deeply stratified sites with relief pottery at lower levels have been found during test excavations.

Work in 1965 will concentrate on consolidating the preliminary investigations with as much activity as possible within the limits of finances and personnel. Publications on Wakaya and Kabara will provide a summary of current knowledge about two regions of Fiji. They perhaps will demonstrate that Fijian archaeology has just as much in common with Polynesia as it has with Melanesia. Indeed, a true understanding of Polynesian prehistory must rely in part on the study of archaeological projects undertaken in Fiji.